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ABSTRACT

The learning community movement is a response to several widespread educational problems, including the mismatched expectations of career-oriented students and research- and discipline-oriented faculty; the inadequate amount of intellectual interaction between students and between faculty and students; the lack of coherence among most of the courses taken by students outside of their major; inadequate resources and opportunities for faculty development; and the growing complexity and interdependence of contemporary issues. Learning communities address these problems, and the atomism of the disciplines, by bringing together people with related interests and giving them the opportunity to learn from each other. The term "learning communities" refers to a variety of approaches, including the following: (1) freshman interest groups, such as those operating at the University of Oregon, which involve triads of courses focusing on such topics as "The Human Environment in Art and Architecture" and "Pre-Health Sciences: Biology/Psychology"; (2) learning clusters, such as LaGuardia Community College's "Freedom and Seeing" cluster of linked courses in English composition, research paper writing, introduction to philosophy, and introduction to art; (3) Federated Learning Communities involving three courses linked by a common theme and an integrative seminar taken by the teacher as well as the students; and (4) the Coordinated Study Model, in which teams of three or four faculty members plan the coordinated study of an over-arching theme in blocks of time that accommodate lectures, discussions, field trips, and other activities. (JMC)

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THE RATIONALE FOR LEARNING COMMUNITIES

and

LEARNING COMMUNITY MODELS

Patrick Hill

Transcribed from a speech given at the Inaugural Conference on Learning Communities of the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, Olympia, WA, October 22, 1985.

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The Rationale for Learning Communities

by
Patrick Hill[1]

The learning community movement, such as it is, is not a response to one problem in higher education: it is a response to a whole complex of issues and the fundamental issues identified by the national reports. It's really a vehicle of response for all of those problems. It is not isolating one problem, nor is it a reform effort like the competency-based movement or intern-based education or anything like that. It is a vehicle for responding to a whole cluster of fundamental ills besetting higher education today.

The concept of learning communities is not a rigid one: there are a great variety of ways in which learning communities can be conceived. The successful ones are all adaptations to the peculiar context of this or that institution.

There are at least seven different issues to which the learning community movement is a response. The first, and most important, which Ernie Boyer addresses in his recent book on the state of colleges and universities in the country, is the **mismatched expectations of students and faculty as to what should be going on in undergraduate education**. In brief, what faculty members are rewarded to do well is quite different from what many good undergraduates are expecting in the classroom.

Two of the most damaging aspects of this mismatch are central concerns of the learning community movement. One is the unrewarding and wasteful mismatch of a research-oriented, discipline-focused faculty with a career-oriented student body lacking an academic heritage. The second central concern is the mismatch between a non-interventionist pedagogy with the fundamental passivity of the student body, which I will later reason is, in large measure, induced by our structures.

So Boyer and others will argue for the necessity for some mediating structures--something which will help the students move closer to what the faculty is expecting and vice-versa, for more effective communication. But as it stand now, there is not only an extraordinary mismatch, but one that descends and deteriorates into an extraordinary waste of resources, with very little interaction.

The second fundamental ill to which the learning communities respond is **the inadequate amount of intellectual interaction between faculty and students, and between students and students**. If there is a single finding

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[1] Transcribed from a speech given by Patrick Hill, Academic Vice President at The Evergreen State College, on October 22, 1985 at the Inaugural Conference on Learning Communities of The Washington Center for Undergraduate Education.

in the research of higher education that can really stand the test of unsympathetic scrutiny, it's the one that relates frequency and kind of interaction with the success of the student body. And yet, in most institutions, even comparatively small ones, interaction between faculty and students is infrequent, and too often limited to term papers and examinations which are frequently, themselves, too mechanical and routinized to have significant educational impact.

Any reform movement which is based on expensive assumptions is going to fail, and some people have so interpreted the learning community movement--Sandy Astin does this in what he has written, that the learning community movement is a "movement toward smallness." If it <u>were</u> a movement toward smallness, it would become a very expensive movement, and for that reason would not have great impact. My feeling is that the communities are more like laboratories, which need to be experienced once, rather than a way of re-structuring a whole college curriculum.

The third fundamental ill to which the learning communities is responding is the lack of relationship or coherence among most of the courses taken by the student outside his or her major. The individual, isolated course, standing on its own and too often created out of the research interests of the professor, deprives the students and the teacher of the widest system of coherent curricular support which would relate the fragmented disciplines to each other and reinforce the significance of what is being taught. That lack of coherence--I think we understand what it does to the student--but few people have focused on what it does to the teacher. It deprives the teacher of a support system. Most of the names that we would mention in a contemporary philosophy course you hear only in that course and no place else. Likewise, for most any other discipline. There is not a coherent set of reinforcing values and foci.

The fourth ill to which the learning communities are responding is the lack of resources and opportunities for faculty development. It is understandable that those resources are no longer available. We have to find ways of internal reallocation to make it possible for faculty to continue to grow.

The fifth ill to which the learning communities are responding is the growing complexity and interdependence of the problems we face with our disciplines--the problems we are trying to solve. Symbolized by events like Love Canal and Three Mile Island, the unmanageability and incomprehensibility of contemporary events underline the need for an additional set of skills in the educated person. As John Kemmeny, former president of Dartmouth and Chairman of President Carter's Commission investigating the Three Mile Island disaster said, "We desperately need individuals who can pull together knowledge from a wide variety of fields and integrate it in one mind. We are in an age where we are facing problems that no one discipline can solve. What we'd like our best students to be able to do is to walk in on a problem, a problem they know nothing at all about, and by working hard, in six months' time become fairly expert at it." He said "fairly expert", not "expert." My feeling is that unless we can do that, then democracy will fail. Unless we can

train people to become fairly expert, at least expert enough to participate in decisions, then we are going to be relying on experts to make decisions for everybody.

The sixth problem to which the learning communities are responding is **the non-completion rate in colleges and universities which has reached alarming proportions**. Only half of the students who start college with the intention of getting a bachelor's degree actually attain this goal. The learning communities have had extraordinary impact on retention. It hasn't been studied in every one of the institutions where the communities exist. But at SUNY-Stony Brook the normal retention rate in the freshman year was 55 per cent; in the learning communities it was 95 per cent.

And the last problem to which the learning communities respond is **shrinking budgets, a professional reward system, and internal patterns of resource allocation which reinforce and perpetuate the dominance of all the previous six structural flaws**. What flows from this is that we need administrative leadership which will do something to counteract the pattern of reinforcing destructive or non-productive behavior.

That's the set of problems to which the learning communities are responding. And, again, my fundamental point--my first point--is that the learning communities are a vehicle of moving on all of those fronts at once. They are not nearly a response to <u>one</u> problem, and certainly not an attempt to make education based on a small scale--valuable as that is.

Now, I want to talk about the learning communities and, not so much how they respond (I'm not going to review the whole structure, you have that in your hands) but what are the fundamental things which they are trying to do (philosophically fundamental)? If we try to isolate one factor as underlying all of those six structural flaws, I think the one which we would isolate is the fragmentation of the disciplines and departments and of the people. The atomism--the social atomism, the structural atomism--which isolates people and enterprises from each other.

I tell two brief stories about the way my thinking was influenced to go in this direction. One concerns an undergraduate student I knew while I was director of undergraduate studies and philosophy in the summertime. She was taking a course in behaviorism from 10:00 to 1:00 and a course in existentialism from 1:00 to 4:00. And she was pulling A's in both courses. In the behaviorism course--this was pure Skinner--she was learning about the .67 predictability of human behavior and of the illusory character of consciousness and intentions and certainly of their insignificance in explaining human behavior. In the philosophy course, which was focused on the early Sartre, she was learning that we are ultimately free, even to the point of being able to define the meaning of our pasts.

I asked her which course was right. She said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "If you had to choose between the two courses, which one would you choose?" She said, "I like the psychology teacher better."

I said, "That's not what I'm asking. Which one is correct? Which one is correct about the nature of our human being?" And she said, "I'm getting A's in both courses."

The other story which I tell about the need for a different sort of structure concerns a colleague of mine, who was teaching philosophy at Stony Brook and whose students were not terribly responsive for a variety of reasons. And he began to feel that he could say anything, and the students would write it down. So one day he decided to test that and, in a manner paralleling what the student was hearing in two different courses, he said virtually opposite things from one day to the next. And the students kept writing them down. And he came to the conclusion that no one cared what he was saying. Not only the students with whom he was spending his time, but none of his colleagues knew what he was saying or thinking either. He left the profession, saying that it was a profession devoted to talking and thinking, but no one was listening.

When we start to respond to that set of ills and to the ills underlying both of those stories, the fundamental structural move is to link related enterprises and to make structural changes which release, for faculties and students, the powers of human association. Dewey, among other people, has stressed that in our individualistic age we have forgotten about the powers of human association--what happens when you put people together.

For example, the stimulation of thought, the exposure to diversity, the need to clarify one's own thinking in the community. And he, among others, has suggested that it is revolutionary to make structural changes which release the power of human association.

It is common to coordinated studies, to clusters and linked courses, and to the federated learning communities, to put people with related interests together and give them time and space-- real time and real space --to learn from each other. You are releasing the capacity of people to learn from each other, and it is as simple as that, what we are after. How you give them real time and real space will vary in different administrative contexts. But I emphasize that a structural change is necessary which actually puts at peoples' disposal real time and real space which is rewarded, and which is there to be used for the sake of learning from each other, learning from diverse perspectives.

Now, you may say, "Doesn't the university or the college have real time and real space to learn from each other? Isn't it set up that way?" And my answer is, "No. It is set up to discourage communication across boundaries, and is even set up to discourage people from having time to talk to each other." So, fundamental to all of these movements is building--into the ordinary time and space, the regular time and space of the people within the institution--the opportunity to work together, to learn from each other, and to release the powers of human association.

If you state it simply, it seems obvious and easy to do. Because we have been living in too isolated and atomistic a fashion, you simply have

to go about it in a dogged fashion. If you create those opportunities and make them real, and reward them, then a tremendous gush of creativity comes forth and people start to learn again, and to feel excited about their work.

Washington Center
for Improving the Quality of
Undergraduate Education

Learning Community Models

Learning Communities

address simultaneously the needs for:

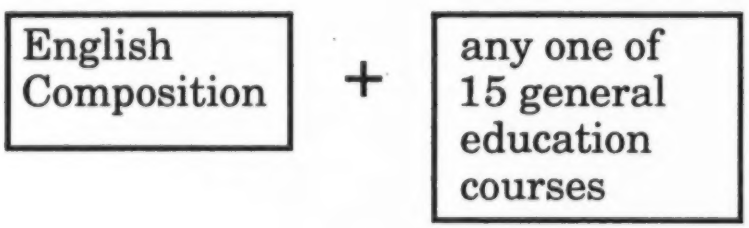
- greater intellectual interaction
  - student ⟷ student
  - student ⟷ faculty
  - faculty ⟷ faculty
- curricular coherence: reinforcement and/or integration of ideas.
- understanding issues which cross subject matter boundaries
- exploring and understanding diverse perspectives
- active learning
- student retention
- faculty development
- low cost methods for doing any or all of the above.

Linked Courses

GOAL: Curricular coherence, and the giving of focus to writing.

- Two or more courses for which students co-register.
- Generally, faculty work to coordinate syllabi and/or assignments.
- Integrative dimension through writing.

University of Washington's Interdisciplinary Writing Program



"F.I.G.'s"
Freshman Interest Groups

GOAL: The creation of small freshman learning communities in a large University setting.

Vehicle: 15 triads of courses offered around " areas of interest ." Each F.I.G. has assigned to it a peer advisor, who convenes the group frequently through the semester.

Pre Law

American Government

+

Introduction to Philosophy: Ethics

+

Fundamentals of Public Speaking

3

Examples of F.I.G.'s
at the University of Oregon

The Human Environment in Art & Architecture	Survey of the Visual Arts Geography of Oregon English Composition
Pre-Health Sciences: Biology/Psychology	General Biology I General Biology Lab Psychology as a Social Science English Composition
Liberal Arts: Our Cultures Ourselves	Intro. to Women's Studies Intro. to Folklore and Myth Fundamentals of Small Group Communication

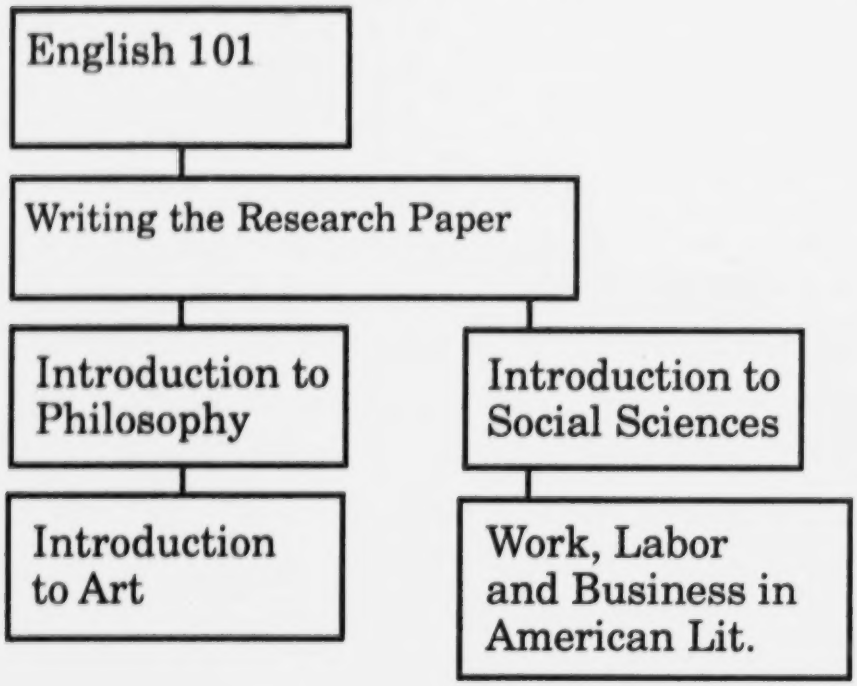
Learning Cluster

LaGuardia Community College

GOAL: coherence, thinking and writing skills, in a learning community setting.

◆ 11 credit, one quarter requirement for **all** day students in Liberal Arts AA Program.

◆ LaGuardia CC runs 7 clusters/year.



3 credits

2 credits

3 credits

3 credits

11 credits total

"Freedom and Seeing "

"Work, Labor and Business in American Life"

5

LaGuardia's Business Cluster

An elective cluster which brings together 3 required courses:

English Composition

+

Intro. to Economics

+

Intro. to Business

Themes:

Public/private enterprise
Big/small enterprise
Consumer and the marketplace
Individual profit
and social profit

"Cluster Procedures"
at La Guardia Community College

Each spring, cluster teams are selected after consultation with and coordination with Liberal Arts Coordinator and Associate Dean of the Faculty.

◆ **Cluster team:**
-reviews syllabi of previous clusters
-reviews "Cluster Principles"
-shares tentative thematic course outlines
-discusses course descriptions, performance objectives
-shares intentions on text purchases
-decides on avenues of communication
-shares term paper suggestions, teaching approaches, pedagogical ideas
-exchanges office hours and location, phone numbers.

◆ End of Quarter: Evaluation and suggestions for the future are filed.

Federated Learning Communities (F.L.C.)

GOALS: learning community, faculty development and integrative learning in a large class environment.

Vehicle: a cohort of students co-registers for 3 "federated" courses linked by a common theme. In addition, they engage in an integrative seminar. The seminar leader is called the Master Learner. S/he takes all 3 federated courses *with* the students. The teachers of the federated courses may choose to participate in the FLC in a variety of ways - or, not at all.

General Genetics

+

The Healer and the Witch in History

+

Philosophy and Medicine

+

3- credit seminar

"Social and Ethical Issues in the Life Sciences"

8

Some F.L.C. topics:

Biology

Astronomy

Science Fiction

"Close Encounters of Three Kinds"
Seattle Central Community College

Philosophy and Technology

History of Technology

Engineering: Man, Technology and Society

"Technology, Values and Society"
SUNY - Stony Brook

Intro. to Psychology

Honors World Lit.

Ecology, Evolution and Behavior

"Human Nature"
University of Maryland
Honors Learning Community

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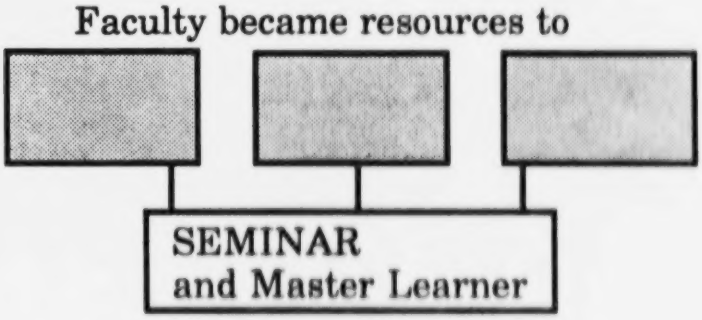
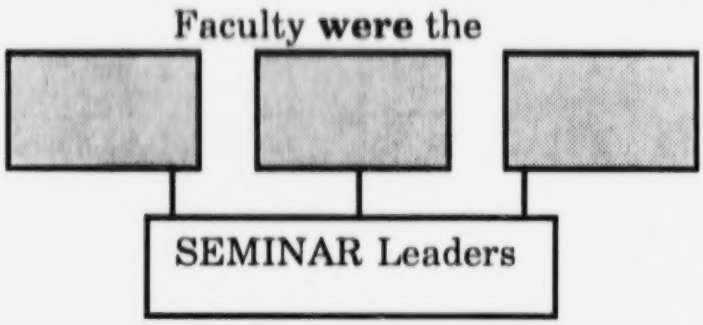
Variations on the F.L.C. model

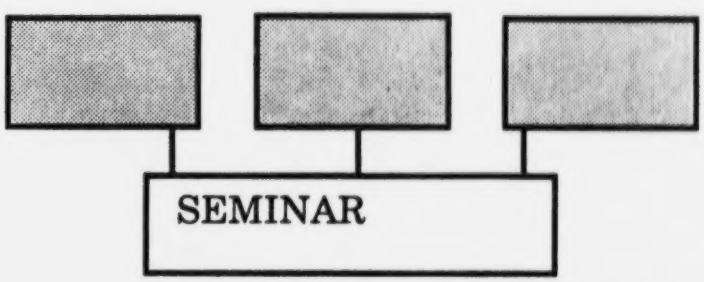
Seattle Central Community College



Centralia College



University of Maryland Honors Program



Master Learner is a High School teacher from the Montgomery County Schools [10]

Coordinated Study Model

GOAL: Learning community engaged "full time" (15-18 credits) in interdisciplinary, active learning around themes. Faculty development through co-planning and team-teaching across disciplinary boundaries.

◆ Faculty teams of 3-4 co-plan the coordinated study around an over-arching theme, or around related content/skills subjects.

◆ Generally, faculty members teach **only** in the coordinated study, and students register for it as their entire "course load".

◆ Therefore, scheduling of class time becomes quite flexible: opportunities for BLOCKS of time for lectures, discussions, field trips, workshops...opportunities for active and cooperative learning.

◆ Frequent use of "book seminars"....the reading of primary texts and work on them in seminars and/or guided small group discussion.

Typical Schedule for coordinated study

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Prep Day	Lecture 9-11	Seminar 9-11	Lecture 9-11	Seminar 9-11
	Writing Workshops 12-2	Faculty Seminar 12-2	Group Workshops 12-2	Faculty Office Hours 12-2

Another typical schedule for coordinated study

'DATA TO INFORMATION"

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8-10 Seminar	9:30 -11 Program Lecture	8-10 Seminar	9-11 Program Lecture	Prep Day
10-12 Math Lecture		10-12 Math Lecture		
	12:30-2:30 Pascal Lecture		12:30-3:30 Pascal Lab	
	2:30-5:30 Digital Logic Lab			

An **atypical** schedule:

"ADVANCED ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES"
Senior level applications program, largely community-based research.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
			8-12 Lecture and Workshops	
			Lunch speaker	
	1-5 Workshops		2-6 Team meetings and work-shops	
			7-10 Seminar	

Credit Equivalencies in Coordinated Studies

Exploration, Discovery and Empire
3 Quarters

8	European and American History
6	Literature
4	History of Science
8	Natural History
4	Journal and Expository Writing
2	Sailing and Seamanship
4	Ecology of Puget Sound
4	Introduction to Mathematics
8	Research Project
48	

Thinking Straight
1 Quarter

4	Informal Logic
4	English Composition
4	Philosophical Issues in Contemporary Culture
4	Contemporary Social Problems
16	

Matter and Motion
3 Quarters

12	Calculus
8	Physics
8	Chemistry
8	Lab computing and programming
12	Inquiry methods
48	

Science Shakes the Foundations:
"Dickens, Darwin, Marx and You"
1 Quarter

5	Physical Anthropology
5	English Composition
3	Comparative Economic Systems
5	Intro to Science
18	

How registration and credit work

in the Quanta Program at
Daytona Beach Community College

"The Nature of Man" combines 3 required semester-long courses in a coordinated study. Students register for "QUANTA" sections.

Humanities 2210: History of Western Thought
CLP 2001: Psychology of Personal Development
ENC 1121: English

9am	History Q-1	Psych Q-2	English Q-3
10am	English Q-1	History Q-2	Psych Q-3
11am	Psych Q-1	English Q-2	History Q-3

All-University Curriculum Courses

University of Hartford

GOAL: Interdisciplinary, integrative team-taught courses-both for faculty and student development.

Breadth categories for All University Courses:

Living in a Cultural Context - Western Heritage

Living in a Cultural Context - Other Cultures

Living Responsively to the Arts

Living in a Social Context

Living in a Scientific and Technological World

Essential Abilities

Developed within the context of the All-University Courses at the University of Hartford

The AUC courses are designed to foster these essential abilities:

Written communication

Oral communication

Critical thinking and problem-solving

Social interaction

Responsibility for civic life

Values identification and responsible decision-making

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